DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 124 EA 018 962

AUTHOR Jakes, Harold E.
TITLE A Profile of Elected School Board Trustees in Ontario.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT Ontario Education; p22-26 Sep-Oct 1982

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Boards of Education; *Demography; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnography; Experience; Foreign Countries; Longitudinal Studies; Needs Assessment; *Profiles; Qualifications; Recruitment; *Socioeconomic Background; Socioeconomic Influences; *Trustees
IDENTIFIERS *Ontario

ABSTRACT

Although systematic national surveys of the recruitment and personal profiles of school board members are regularly conducted in the United States, few demographic or ethnographic studies have been conducted in Canada, in general, or in Ontario, in particular. This paper reviews (1) the brief history of school board recruitment and constituency in Ontario; (2) the limited literature available in this area; and (3) the findings of two research studies that are part of the development of a longitudinal profile of Ontario school board trustees. A historical overview shows that in Ontario, as in the United States, upper and middle class domination of educational governance has, for a variety of reasons, existed since the pioneer period. Major conclusions drawn from the literature (Cistone 1974) and the two research studies (Jakes 1977 and 1982) are as follows: (1) although the majority of Ontario's employed citizens are found in the lower three socioeconomic groups, 75 percent of school board members come from the upper three classes of Canadian society; (2) four out of five Ontario school trustees are male; and (3) trustees' years of experience on the school board fall into quartiles, with a turnover rate of 25 percent of the incumbents at each election. Further study may be needed to determine the possible effects of a projected increase in trustees' terms of office from 2 to 3 years. (IW)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Harold E. Jakes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED276124

# A PROFILE OF ELECTED SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES IN ONTARIO

by
HAROLD E. JAKES, Ed. D
*Associate Professor, Faculty of Education*
*University of Ottawa*

EA 018 962

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## INTRODUCTION

*At the elementary school level in particular, local governance of education by elected school board trustees in Ontario is an historical tradition. It is also one which is jealously guarded by its citizens. Although the literature documents the number of trustees who have served on various kind of school boards which have evolved during the last century and one half, many questions concerning the recruitment and personal profiles of the trustees have received little attention and limited research. For example: Who are these elected school board trustees? From what levels of Canadian society do they come? Is the trusteeship dominated by males? How much experience do they have as school board members? Are they representative of the communities which they serve? and How long do the incumbents remain in office?*

*Few demographic or ethnographic studies have been conducted in Canada or in Ontario which answer the questions listed above. The purpose of this paper is to review the limited literature which is available in this area and to report the findings of two research studies (Jakes, 1977, 1982) in order to move toward the development of a longitudinal profile of Ontario school board trustees.*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Ontario, upper and middle class domination of educational governance is not a twentieth century phenomenon. During the pioneer period, church leaders and those who held high economic or social positions exercised strong local control of schooling in order to provide an elite class of educated persons to succeed them. The common people, prior to 1816, were neither encouraged nor discouraged in their efforts to establish schools. According to Fleming (1971), The Common School Act of 1816 was the first government legislation that "provided for the election by the inhabitants of any 'town, township, village, or place' of three 'fit and discreet persons' as trustees" (p.112). The three-man school boards who governed these one-room rural schools were probably the most representative of any constituency in Ontario's history. Being responsible for the needs of individuals in very small communities, trustees elected to these "one-school" boards provided personal and immediate attention to the establishment and operation of neighbourhood schools. They also served without any form of remuneration and they usually assisted personally with the building and administration of their school.

Zeigler (1977) indicates a similar recruitment pattern in the United States whereby neighbourhood school boards were established and the trustees elected to them were elected on a "ward" basis. Because of ward representation, Zeigler stated "that each school board member represented an unambiguous constituency and was held accountable by it" (p.534).

While the upper classes of Ontario society allowed elementary schools to be governed by elected public and separate school board trustees, they maintained a much firmer grip on secondary or high school trustee representation. Until 1969, when the elected county boards of education were established as the smallest unit of administration, and they became responsible for the operation of both elementary and secondary education, trustees for the high school boards continued to be an elite "appointed" group. Although cities and towns were permitted to establish boards of education and to elect board members to control their elementary and secondary education as early as 1850, some cities continued to support an appointed high school board. The Collegiate Institute Board for the City of Ottawa was a prime example of this phenomenon of elite recruitment as it persisted as an appointed high school board until 1969-1970 when the Ottawa Public School Board and it were required to merge and all trustees were elected.

Even when boards of education were established, the concept of "election at large" usually ensured the domination of trustee membership by upper and middle class citizens. People from lower class neighbourhoods were often intimidated by the prospect of having to run against professionals or businessmen and by the substantial costs involved in a city-wide election. Zeigler (1977) makes reference to a similar change in the governance of American schools. He cites the example of St. Louis in 1896 where professionals and businessmen constituted only 14% of the board when board members were elected by wards. With the change to "at large elections" in 1897, professionals and businessmen then constituted 83% of the board (p. 536). When the first systematic national survey of the origins of board members took place in the United States in 1927, the St. Louis pattern of upper and middle class control had become universal. Zeigler stated that "Upper Class domination of school board members meant that 90% were male; 96% were white; 70% were college graduates; 36% earned income in excess of $30,000 (1927); 66% were from business and the professions; and 85% were Protestant" (p. 536).

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER RECRUITMENT: THE CASE OF ONTARIO

Although systematic national surveys of the origins of school board members are conducted at regular intervals in the Untied States, very limited Canadian research in general, and Ontario research in particular, is available. Cistone (1974), in a classic Ontario case study of school board member recruitment, analysed a stratified random sample of thirty public school systems in Ontario. Although Cistone was more interested in how incumbent board members had been recruited for the trusteeship, the demographic data which he collected indicated that "although only about half of the population in our sample of school systems were engaged in white-collar occupations, nearly nine-tenths of the school board members were so engaged" (p. 49). When Cistone classified their occupations using the "Blishen Socio-Economic Index for Occupations in Canada", he found that "nearly all rank among the top half of society's occupations" (p. 49). Cistone claims that these non-legislated, socioeconomic considerations seem to structure the recruitment process so that the many who are legally qualified to be a trustee are narrowed to a few. His claim is that these socioeconomic qualifications appear to reduce, by at least 75 percent, the number of people who can reasonably be expected to run for the office of trustee (p. 49).

## THE 1977 PROFILE OF ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES

A comprehensive study, which established a profile of Ontario school board trustees, was conducted in 1977 (Jakes, 1977). In a second study in 1981, the results were replicated using a stratified random sample of 36 Ontario school boards. The results from the second study (Jakes, 1982) will be discussed later in the paper.

### The 1977 Sample

In the 1977 study, raw data were obtained from the Ministry of Education's "School Board Membership 1977" form ME522 (Rev. 76-11). Immediately following the election of trustees to Ontario school boards in December 1976, each chief executive officer, as the secretary of the board, completed the form in triplicate, retained one copy and sent the original and a second copy to the regional office where the original was then forwarded to the Ministry. In an attempt to obtain these data from the Ministry of Education, concern was expressed by their officials that the occupational information might be inaccurate. In this light, a letter was prepared and sent to each school board requesting the director of education to photostat a copy of the form, to differentiate between male and female trustees, to list the years of trustee experience for each board member, to clarify more specifically their occupations and to send the information to the researcher.

(CONTINUED)

More than a 90 percent return was obtained and the data which were received represented 72 of the 77 boards of education (96 percent return) and 41 of the 48 county and district separate school boards (85 percent return). This provided a data base of information on 1632 of the possible 1800 school board trustees in Ontario who were elected to office for the two-year term of 1977 and 1978.

## Measurement Instrument

The instrument used to classify the trustees' occupations was the same one which Cistone employed in 1974. It was first developed by Blishen in 1958 and updated at each Canadian census, including 1961 and 1971. Blishen (1968) was able to rank the occupations which are listed in Canadian census reports in accordance with their socioeconomic status which is determined by education and income variables (p. 742). The "Blishen Socio-Economic Index for Occupations in Canada" used in this research was the 1971 update of the 1961 scale. The new 1971 scale represented an increase in the number of occupation classifications from 320 in 1961 to 480 and a reduction in the number of major classes from seven in 1961 to six.

In the 1971 scale, Class 1 occupations included professions with both high education requirements and earning power. Class 2 occupations were those which were regarded as professional and business class groupings while Class 3 occupations were white and blue collar jobs with high remuneration. The lower-paying occupations were in Classes 4 and 5 and they represented more than 50 percent of the number of occupations and employed persons in Canada. Class 6 included the lowest-paying white and blue collar occupations.

Those who listed occupations on the Ministry of Education form as housewife (188), retired (75), self-employed (28) and student (3) could not be classified using the Blishen scale. It was still possible, however, to classify 1353 (90 percent) of the 1647 school board trustees in the sample.

## Findings

When the occupations of the 1353 trustees from all school boards were classified in accordance with the six classes of the Blishen scale (see Table 1), more than 75 percent of the incumbent trustees were found to be members of Classes 1, 2 and 3. Although the majority of Canadians hold jobs which would fall within Classes 4 and 5, only 11 percent of the trustees elected in 1976 came from this largest group of employed citizens. It is interesting to note an increase in Class 6 (13 percent) and this can probably be explained by the fact that farmers comprise the majority of this classification of trustees, particularly in Western and Mid-Western Ontario, and because they seem to report a low net income, they are members of Class 6 in the Blishen scale.

**Table 1**
**Classification of Trustees' Occupations**

| Trustee Groupings | Classes and Percentages in Each | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| All School Boards | 21 | 34 | 20 | 7 | 4 | 13 |
| Boards of Education | 22 | 35 | 19 | 6 | 4 | 14 |
| Separate School Boards | 18 | 30 | 23 | 10 | 6 | 13 |

The difference between public boards of education and separate school boards were not very significant (see Table 1). The main difference was at the upper end of the scale where 57 percent of the trustees elected to public boards of education were in Classes 1 and 2 compared to 48 percent in these two classifications who were separate school trustees. In Class 6, the percentages were almost identical with only minor differences appearing in Classes 3 and 4 (see Table 1).

Regional differences in the occupations of trustees appear to be more significant than the difference between the members of the two major types of school boards (see Table 2). The regions with the largest number of Classes 1 and 2 trustees were those which included large urban centers. Western and Mid-Western Ontario regions are more rural and this was reflected in the increase in Class 6 representation as many of the trustees are farmers.

In 1976, there were nine Ministry of Education geographical regions and regional offices. At present, the number has been reduced to six. In this light, the data which were gathered early in 1977 were analysed to reflect the regional differences using the nine geographical regions. Differences between regions with respect to trustee occupation classification are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**
**Classification of Trustees' Occupations by Regions**

| Regions | Number of Trustees | Classes and percentage in Each | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Northwestern | 146 | 20 | 27 | 20 | 15 | 9 | 9 |
| Midnorthern | 133 | 14 | 33 | 23 | 8 | 11 | 12 |
| Northeastern | 155 | 17 | 41 | 20 | 11 | 6 | 6 |
| Western | 146 | 25 | 23 | 19 | 7 | 3 | 23 |
| Midwestern | 123 | 15 | 29 | 19 | 8 | 3 | 26 |
| Niagara | 115 | 24 | 34 | 22 | 5 | 3 | 12 |
| Central | 264 | 24 | 41 | 21 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| Eastern | 136 | 18 | 36 | 19 | 10 | 3 | 15 |
| Ottawa Valley | 135 | 28 | 29 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 29 |
| All Trustees | 1353 | 21 | 34 | 20 | 7 | 4 | 13 |

If 75 percent of Ontario school board trustees seem to be members of the three upper and upper-middle classes of society, it would be interesting to speculate on how much higher this percentage might have been if the provincial legislature had allowed the new county boards to be elected "at large" rather than a type of "ward" designation whereby rural townships were guaranteed seats on the large county boards in 1969. Should the Ontario government move to an even larger unit of administration such as regional school boards, the number of trustees recruited among the upper classes may increase even further unless guarantees are provided which will protect rural communities from complete domination by urban representatives.

Although many may think that female representation on school boards today is low, it has probably increased from practically zero two decades ago. In the 1977 survey, the data revealed that 18 percent of 299 of the 1647 trustees in the sample were women. This is a 4.5-1 ratio which favours men. There were differences between public and separate school board male-female representation. Twelve percent of the separate school trustees were female compared to 21 percent of the public board trustees. Regional differences seem to be more significant (see Table 3) as they range from a 7.77-1 male-dominated Eastern region to a 3.33-1 ratio of men to women in the Central region.

With respect to the years of experience for the 1647 trustees in the 1977 sample, the data analysis indicated a 25 percent turnover of trustees at each election. In this light, 27 percent of the trustees had less than two years experience and were newly elected in 1977, 23 percent had two or three years experience (elected in 1975), 25 percent had four, five or six years of experience, and 25 percent had more than seven years of experience. The data indicated that slightly more than 60 percent of Ontario trustees had four or less years of experience.

**Table 3**
**Male - Female Ratio**

| Region | Male | Female | Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|
| Northwestern | 140 | 39 | 3.58-1 |
| Mid-northern | 132 | 26 | 5.07-1 |
| Northeastern | 151 | 41 | 3.68-1 |
| Western | 150 | 29 | 5.17-1 |
| Midwestern | 125 | 17 | 7.35-1 |
| Niagara | 105 | 28 | 3.75-1 |
| Central | 260 | 78 | 3.33-1 |
| Eastern | 140 | 18 | 7.77-1 |
| Ottawa Valley | 145 | 23 | 6.30-1 |
| Totals | 1348 | 299 | 4.50-1 |
| Percentages | 82% | 18% | |

Differences between public and separate school trustees were only significant at opposite ends of the scale. In this respect, 30 percent of the public trustees were newly elected compared to 22 percent of the separate school trustees. A wider variation occurred at the upper end of the scale where 23 percent of the public school trustees had eight or more years of experience compared to 38 percent of the separate school trustees.

When the mean was calculated regionally, the years of trustee experience ranged from a high mean of 4.38 years in the Midwestern region to a low of 2.96 years in the Northeastern region. The provincial mean was 3.71 years of experience for all trustees.

## THE 1981 PROFILE OF ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEES

In an attempt to develop a longitudinal profile of school board membrship, a much less extensive sample was used in 1981 compared to the comprehensive survey which was conducted in 1977. The main purpose of the 1981 study, however, was to sample the opinion of Ontario trustees with respect to the question of providing full-time representation for their constituencies (Jakes, 1982). Demographic data concerning the respondents were collected in addition to the answers to the survey question in order to compare the results with the 1977 study and to develop a longitudinal trustee profile.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed and 36 school boards in a total population of ± 125 were surveyed. Questionnaires were sent to the 558 trustees who were board members of the 36 boards within the randomized sample. The 36 boards included: public and separate boards from all six Ministry of Education regions; boards with both large and small student populations; and board in urban and rural areas.

### Findings

The return from the trustees was disappointing as less than 40 percent (200 trustees) in the randomized sample returned their questionnaire. However, when the demographics of the respondents were analysed and studied in relation to the results of the comprehensive 1977 study, the profile was very similar even though the number of respondents was only slightly more than 12 percent of the 1977 total survey.

Again, 59 of the 194 respondents could not be classified using the Blishen scale (1971) as no occupation was listed by ten respondents, twenty-five listed their occupation as housewife, and there were ten retired persons, two who were self-employed and two students. When the remain-

ing 135 trustees were classified, there were 34 in Class one, 52 in Class two, and 24 in Class three. These three upper classifications of Ontario society represented a total of 81 percent of the trustees who could be classified. This result compares to 75 percent in the 1977 study and, although the number of respondents is too small to claim that upper class recruitment is increasing, it would be reasonable to conclude that at least three-quarters or 75 percent of the trustees in the randomized sample continue to demonstrate upper class domination of school board membership. Only 25 trustees or 19 percent of the respondents who could be classified were in the middle or lower socioeconomic groupings of Classes four, five and six.

The male-female ratio remained relatively steady although there was a slight decrease in the ratio of males to females from 4.5-1 in 1977 to 3.31-1 in 1981. Whether this indicates that an increasing number of female trustees are being elected to school boards since 1977 or merely demonstrates that females are more conscientious with respect to returning their questionnaires than males, is unknown.

The experience as trustees was almost identical to the results in 1977. In the 1981 randomized sample, 24 percent of the trustee respondents had less than two years of experience as board members, 25 percent had two or three years, 23 percent had four, five or six years, and 28 percent had more than seven years of experience. The results seem to indicate a normal 25 percent turnover of trustees each election year as one in four incumbents decides not to stand for re-election or is defeated at the polls. It is possible that the new proposed three-year term may increase the turnover rate as trustees give more serious consideration to a three-year community commitment compared to a two-year term of office which was required previously.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the research with respect to a profile of elected school board trustees in Ontario is limited (Cistone, 1974; Jakes, 1977, 1982), certain conclusions can be drawn.

1. Upper class domination of trustee representation seems to follow the American pattern. Using the Blishen scale as a measurement instrument for classification, all three research studies show that Ontario school board trustees are recruited from the upper three classes of Canadian society and 75 percent or three of every four board members come from this elite group. Although the majority of Ontario's employed citizens would be found in the lower three socioeconomic groups, 25 percent or less of the trustees are recruited from these classes of society.

2. Four of every five elected school trustees in Ontario are male. However, the interest shown by women to seek election to public office, particularly the trusteeship, seems to be increasing. The 1981 study (Jakes, 1982) appears to indicate an increase of perhaps two of five trustees being women, as a possibility. Because the sample was small, this apparent increase cannot be stated conclusively.

3. The years of experience as Ontario trustees seem to fall into quartiles with a turnover rate of one-quarter or 25 percent of the incumbents at each election.

In conclusion, it would appear that an Ontario school board trustee profile would have the following characteristics: 1) Canadian citizen; 2) of the full age of eighteen years; 3) resident within the rate of jurisdiction of the board; 4) a public or separate school elector; 5) a member of the upper three classes of Canadian society (75 percent); 6) male (75 percent); and 7) with four years or less experience as a trustee (60 percent).

Municipal politicians, including elected school board trustees, appear to have successfully lobbied the Government of Ontario to increase their term of office from two to three years. This extension in their mandate is to be effected at the next Ontario municipal elections scheduled for November, 1982. Whether this change in the length of the term of office will result in any significant shift from what has become an elite recruitment of middle and upper class members of society as trustees, is doubtful. Owing to a much longer commitment for the position, it may further discourage recruitment from other classes of Ontario society. It may be worthwhile, therefore, to study whether this proposed legislated change from a two-year to a three-year term of office for elected school board trustees will alter the longitudinal profile which has been developed from several research studies which have been conducted in Ontario during the last decade.

References

*Blishen, Bernard et al (Editors). Canadian Society-Sociological Perspectives. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.*

*Cistone, Peter. School board member recruitment: The case of Ontario. The Journal of Educational Administration. Volume XII, Number 2, October, 1974, 42-56.*

*Fleming, W.G. The Administrative Process. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.*

*Jakes, Harold E. Profile of Elected School Trustees in Ontario. Unpublished research project for the Department of Educational Administration, O.I.S.E., Toronto, 1977.*

*Jakes, Harold E. The question of full-time trustees. Ontario Education. Volume 14, Number 2, March/April, 1982, 6-10.*

*Zeigler, L. Harmon et al. How school control was wrested from the people. Phi Delta Kappan. March, 1977, 534-539.*